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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006369

SIPDIS

NOFORN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN ALLEGATIONS OF SYRIAN-AL-QA'IDA/ZARQAWI
TIES ROOTED IN DEEP MISTRUST OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS

REF: A. AMMAN 5876

[1](#)B. AMMAN 6171

[1](#)C. AMMAN 3351

[1](#)D. AMMAN 3288

[1](#)E. AMMAN 6215

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b)(d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Jordanian officials over the last several weeks have expressed their concern about alleged Syrian support for al-Qa'ida and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi operatives, pointing to ongoing smuggling activity through Jordan's northern frontier as a major worry. There is no indication available to us that the Syrian government is complicit in operational planning, but officials claim that Zarqawi affiliates receive logistical support from Syrian intelligence and are allowed to operate relatively unfettered in Syria. The April bomb plot targeting the U.S. Embassy and Jordanian government buildings in Amman piqued the GOJ's concern about Syrian support for Zarqawi's network, since suspects and materiel were intercepted en route from Syria. The bomb plot may have been the catalyst for these allegations, but Jordan's concerns also are rooted in deep and longstanding mistrust about Syrian intentions. Jordan's \$400 million request for border security assistance almost certainly is a factor encouraging officials to emphasize this particular threat, but Jordan's concerns about ongoing al-Qa'ida/Zarqawi activity -- and its proven determination to target Jordan -- are real, and growing. End Summary.

JORDANIANS ALLEGE SYRIAN-AL-QA'IDA/ZARQAWI LINK

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Over the past several weeks, senior Jordanian officials, including King Abdullah, General Intelligence Directorate Chief Sa'ad Kheir, Foreign Minister Muasher, Air Force Commander Prince Feisal, and JAF Chief of Staff General Nsairat, have raised in various meetings with U.S. officials their concerns about alleged official Syrian support to al-Qa'ida/Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (refs a and b). The massive bomb plot against the U.S. Embassy and GOJ targets disrupted in April in which Jordanian and Syrian Zarqawi operatives attempted to smuggle weapons and explosives through the Jordanian-Syrian border (refs c and d), appears to be the genesis of the GOJ's heightened concern. Although Jordanian officials took pains to publicly downplay any official Syrian connection to the plot at the time, they privately express the conviction that such activity could not occur without at least tacit approval and logistical support from Syrian officials.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Requests for further information from GOJ officials have yielded (uncorroborated) allegations that Syrian intelligence has allowed Zarqawi operatives safehaven in Syria, facilitated their transit between Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, and provided other logistical support. For example, the Jordanians point to an alleged meeting in Damascus between Syrian intelligence and one of the individuals arrested in the April bomb plot in Amman. According to the Jordanians, the Syrians called in the operative two weeks before he was arrested in Jordan, asked him some perfunctory questions (substance of which is unknown) and released him. It is not clear what prompted the Syrians to call him in, or if they realized who he was or what he was planning.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Jordanian officials also point to the lax Syrian enforcement at the two main border crossings into Jordan, noting that several suspects and their weaponry in the April bomb plot entered Jordan were caught on the Jordanian side of the Jaber crossing. Militants have long favored the Syrian-Jordanian border in their efforts to smuggle weapons and explosives destined for the West Bank. The Jordanians believe it is highly unlikely that Syrian officials at the border have no idea what is going on. They believe that the Syrians in some cases are looking the other way, and that some "bad apples" are actually complicit in the activity,

receiving bribes from the infiltrators. While it is not clear to the Jordanians how far up the chain of command this goes, they are not willing to absolve Damascus of responsibility. A Jordanian military official believes that if the Syrians were genuinely committed to policing the border, effectiveness could be enhanced. He noted that fear of Israeli military retaliation ensures that the Syrians prevent such traffic through the Golan -- evidence the Syrians can stop infiltrators when motivated to do so.

JORDANIAN CONCERN ROOTED IN INTENSE DISTRUST OF SYRIA

15. (S/NF) Longstanding bad blood between Jordan and Syria and continued frosty relations on multiple fronts have intensified Jordanian suspicions about Syria's intentions. Jordanian decision makers have a lively awareness of the long, troubled history of bilateral relations and persistent Syrian efforts to destabilize Jordan starting in the 1950s. In particular, Jordanians will not soon forget Syria's role in the 1970 "civil war" and support for Palestinian rejectionist groups' bombings in Jordan in the 1980s with Damascus' approval. Jordan's public announcement that the suspected Zargawi plotters in April had entered from Syria angered Damascus, prompting the Syrians to retaliate on the trade front. Jordanian companies wishing to export products to Syria must now certify that their products contain no Israeli content. (Ironically, trade figures show the political wrangling has not affected booming Syrian-Jordanian trade which will be reported septel.)

16. (S/NF) Personal enmity between some Jordanian and Syrian officials seems to also be playing into this dynamic. For example, GID Chief Saad Kheir and his Syrian counterpart Hassan Khalil barely speak. The King's advisors quote him as describing Bashar as "useless," unable or unwilling to improve the situation, despite assurances to the contrary. The Jordanians complain that their requests for information on suspected terrorists often are ignored or only partially answered, compiling the frustration and suspicion over Syrian activities.

COMMENT

17. (S/NF) The GOJ's outstanding \$400 million request for border security assistance undoubtedly plays into its desire to raise border security issues at every opportunity, but the Syria-al-Qa'ida/Zargawi issue remains a major source of anxiety for Jordanian officials. Lax Syrian border enforcement (at best) and Syrian safehaven and logistical support for Zargawi operatives -- confirmed or not -- is a valid worry. As the April bomb plot, and more recently an infiltration attempt into Israel (ref e), demonstrates, Jordan's border security concerns are substantial. GOJ officials believe that al-Qa'ida and Zargawi are undeterred by multiple disruptions of their activities in Jordan, and it is just a matter of time before they try again. Jordanian officials express some mystification about Syrian objectives in permitting these al-Qa'ida/Zargawi activities but have no doubt that if Syria chose to put an end to them, it could.

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